

## Civil War Letters

Eli Burdick, an ancestor of many of us Burdicks and others wrote these letters home during the Civil War to his family in Illinois over a period of three years of his service in the Union Army. He served as a musician (fifer). Also included is one letter from a friend of the Burdicks, Gideon B. Long, about whom I have no information apart from what is contained in the letter itself. The letters, addressed to his family from a number of locations throughout the South as indicated in the headings of the letters themselves, contain a great deal of information about the life of an enlisted man during the war, as well as insights into life in Illinois during this period.

These letters were treasured and preserved by Eli's wife Huldah, and after her death were passed down to his children, finally ending up in the hands of their daughters Mary Jane ("Mate"), Julia and Henrietta (also called "Etta" and "Et" in the letters).

Prior to their deaths, Aunt Mate and Aunt Julia passed the letters to my grandfather George Linden Burzell, whose grandmother was Henrietta (Burdick) Odgen. About 1962, my grandfather passed the letters to me, and they remain with me to this day. It's a pleasure to share them with Eli's many descendants thru the Burdick Newsletter done by Howard Burdick and members of Foothills Society.

Submitted by Linden Burzell ([burzell@sbcglobal.net](mailto:burzell@sbcglobal.net))

(Even though I'm not much of a Civil War buff, I have found it fascinating to see insights into how our forefathers endured that period in history. Linden has graciously provided such a glimpse by providing letters he has from Eli Burdick (I1804) and others. Eli was a musician in Company K, 95th Regiment, Illinois Volunteers. He participated in many campaigns over the course of the war and was not young when he served - he was in his late 40s. These are letters written to his wife, Huldah, and children back home. What amazes me is not only the discussion of what he was experiencing, but the day-to-day talk you would imagine between family members. -- HB)

From Eli Burdick To Huldah, his wife

Mentions William and Mary Jane, two of his children  
Providence, Louisiana  
April the 4th, 1863

Dear Wife and Children,

I once more take this opportunity to write a few lines to you to let you know of my health, which is very good for the present and I hope these lines will find you all the same. William said in his letter that Grandpa was sick. I hope he will soon recover. I wrote to William a few days ago and I sent you two dollars more. You and William must let me know if you get all the money I send you. Let me know if the girls get their little ten cent currencies. The talk is that we will get four months more pay soon. If I do, I shall send you some more money. I shall get 48 dollars.

Now Huldah, the talk is that they are going to give furloughs to the men to come home for thirty days, and if they should, I should have to keep some money to come home with, as I should have to pay half fare on the railroad. It would cost some eight or ten dollars. Now Huldah, I will do as you think best about coming home, providing I should get a furlough. I would like to see you all, but come to part with you all it would be too hard for me, so I will leave it to you. I don't know but we shall stay here some time to guard the place and hospital, but it is a hard thing what will happen in war.

We have not had much fighting yet, but when the ball opens to Vicksburg we may yet have a chance to dance, be we can't tell. I have had twenty-six dollars and forty-seven cents worth of clothing and I don't think that I shall have to get any more til this year is out. That will leave some fourteen dollars and a half coming to me out of the forty-two that is allowed to every soldier. I have sent my old letters home in my overcoat and there is a descriptive roll in one of the old envelopes. I would like to have you keep it. It might be of some use.

Tell William I have got another fife. The government has furnished us with some new fifes. They are "C" fifes. I sent Big Bill the highnotes. When he gets the big fife, he can play all night, but he must get up in the morning. Tell Mary Jane to get up early and help the boys do the chores and get ready to go to school with the little girls. When I come home, I will fetch them some presents. I am going to write to Phoebe Jane before long. Uncle Bur is getting fat and he lays on the bank asleep. The weather is warm here. The roses is in the blow and white clover, so the honey bees is working finely and the birds is singing all over. We have a bird here that beats your brown thrush. He is about as large and he is black and white but he is a good singer.

Huldah, you must keep this letter. I must close. Give my respect to all the folks both old and young. Good bye from you old soldier. To his dear wife and children.

EB to HB

From Eli Burdick To Huldah, his wife

Mentions Thomas, Eli's brother

Vicksburg, November the 5th, 1863

Dear Pullet and Chickens,

Your old creeper rooster has put up fifty-five dollars in the old pocket book to send to you. I have sent a letter in the same side with the money. Bur has put in fifty-five dollars done up in a letter stating what to do with his money. He wants you to let Mr. Drake have fifty and take a receipt. Then let Grandpa have five and Bur wants you to get a receipt of Mr. Drake for the note of John Orths for the harness. I write this because I don't know when Cordean will start. He has got a furlough and is awaiting to get it signed, so maybe this will reach you before he does.

I have write to Uncle Thomas Burdick to help William buy two thousand feet of fence boards, for I thought you would want to keep some money to help support them chickens as the season for scratching for worms is about over so I shall have to furnish a little help. If I was there, I could furnish some worms or help scratch for some. If you think you can buy more fencing, you may do so, but don't rob yourselves of all your money. Keep some to help you. I shall send some more probably before Christmas. William, stick to the fence. See Mr. Smith and see if he will change works with you next spring and help you build fence. Mr. Lawley will help you drive your posts. I think he is a very accommodating neighbor. The weather is very warm here for November. It is raining today. There is not much war news here to write. We are laying in camp, now maybe lay here till spring. It will suit me if we do.

Old pullet, the youngest chickens' present is in the middle of the pocket book. I will send some for the rest some other time or send a bill; then you can get the silver. Each chicken a half dollar and Ma will have a present when the war is over and gets her old man back or a pester when he comes. I shall have wrote falderal enough, so I will close by saying if Cordean Bruce don't come I will send the money by someone else. Good-bye, give my respects to all.

From Mr. Eli Burdick to Mrs. Huldah Burdick, his worth old companion, and all the children and Grandpa and Grandma. Good-bye.

from [Unidentified] To Mary Jane Burdick, Eli's daughter mentions William, Eli's son  
Vicksburg, Jan 16th [probably 1864]

Dear Mary

Good morning. How do you do. Your kind letter reached me safely by mail a few days ago. I was pleased to here from you to here that you are well and the rest of the folks and are getting along as well as you are. I am well at present. Your Pa is well. He got a letter from your new sister yesterday.

I sit here writing. Ely lies in the bunk by the side of me trying to take a snooze. We are here in camp enjoying our selves as well as can be. Expected have some fun as we call it. It is pretty cold weather here now and has been for some time.

I understand it has been very cold up there this winter. It must make it very bad for you girls to get along but you must play boy and do the best you can. I think you and Raepha can make it go pretty well. I expect there will be another man in the family before long. I expect to here of you getting married next. It seems to be a marrying time up there. I suppose it must be done thats is but I want to think before I got married.

I understand that William is very sick. I am very sorry he enlisted. He is not fit for a soldier. He can't stand it. It wants the best of men here. He ought to of took my advice. I told him to be sure and not enlist. Such boys is of no account here.

I have nothing much to write that will interest you Mary Jane. You may look for a Christmas present in my next letter

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from Eli Burdick To Huldah, his wife  
Mentions Henrietta (Etta), Eli's daughter  
Vicksburg, March 2nd, 1864

Friends if I have any, I think I must have wrote so much trash home lately that all my folks and friends have soured on me, as the boys say when their pullets don't write. William has not wrote since he listed and ??? has stopped now and I do not expect to hear from home any more unless it is by way of the neighbors letters.

I am here in Vicksburg yet about half crazy. Don't sleep much. Don't eat much. Live in misery but that is too good for the old hound. I believe its better than I deserve. I have drawn some money the other day, but I haven't got much left. I don't know where it has gone.

Huldah, I expect you will have to go to work out. Maybe you can get places for the little girls where they can go to school. Then you can find some place where you can work and get some clothes to keep you from freezing next winter. Then Mary Jane and Thomas can find work.

I think I expect to hear every letter that William is dead and buried. He might just as well be as to come in the army, for he never will live his three years out if he comes. Not that I want to discourage him. They have told him the last fine story before he listed. No if he don't come when he is able, they will send a man and charge bayonet on him and make him come. If I thought he would have to stay his time out, I would rather hear that he is dead before he comes. Not that I am afraid that he will die by the enemy, but our officers or what is called our superiors. They grow harsher and harder every day. The human feelings is all gone for the poor privates. They all strive for office.

Well, I have wrote trash enough so I will stop. I will send Et a ring. I made it out of good silver for her little finger. I think it is big enough, though it ain't very big. Anyhow, I don't expect to get any answer from this. No matter. It ain't worth answering. You must do as you think best. I can't tell what is best for you.

I shan't list no more for bounty or anything else. I mean to be my own nigger in about 17 months more if I don't get in states prison or some other guard house, but no more for now.

From E.B. to all  
Give the ring to Etta Burdick

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From Gideon B. Long (a family friend or neighbor) To Mary Jane, Eli's daughter  
Mentions Rowland Lewis, Eli's father-in-law

Vicksburg, May 27 [probably 1864]

Mary Jane, I received you kind letter with the greatest of pleasure. I am well at present and hope this will find you the same. We have had a pretty rough time since I wrote to you before. We have been in not less than a dozen fights, but as luck is on my side I have escaped unhurt. But we are out of the Red River country again. The 16th and 17th Corps had to cover old Bank's retreat all the way to the river. We had to fight most every day, but the worst of all is our army got badly whipped.

Our regiment has been very lucky considering what we have been through. Co. K has lost two men killed. One died with sickness. Gabe Cornwell is killed. Hanson Perkins is killed. Evidently Steve Brown shot him from the rear rank in a fight. He got badly excited, I suppose. George Slater's brother is dead, but we are out of the Red River country again; I am not sorry. We expect to leave here in a few days for Cairo. Where we will go from there is hard to tell. We expect to get some pay here. I hope we will for we need it very bad. If you could of seen us when we got back, you would of thought we were a regiment of ragamuffins.

I understand that Eli is home. I am glad he got the chance. You and your Ma must not think I have forgotten you because I did not write before. I haven't had any chances. Huldy wanted to know whether she should wait until I get home before we had her father's funeral sermon preached. Tell her to do as she thinks best. I should like to have it put off until I come home if she thinks best.

I must say that I feel sad today. The hardships on this trip has been great. When I came to hear of the death of father its more than I can stand without being sad. I can't see much in this world worth living for. It's a world of sorrow. But Huldy the time is not far distant when the weary will be at rest and war and fighting will be done for with us forever.

I will close this letter for this time. Give my love to all. Write soon. Let your Ma read this.

Gideon B. Long

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From Eli Burdick To Mary Jane, his daughter, Mentions William, Eli's son  
Camp Near Atlanta, Georgia July the 25th, 1864

Well, Mary Jane, I received a letter from you yesterday, and I was glad to hear you was all well. I am sorry I have no money to send you, but I have not drawn any yet and I do not think I will til I get with our regiment. I can't tell you when that will be. The letter I received from you was the one that had William's letter in it. I was glad to hear that he was enjoying himself so well. I have seen some awful times since I left William. Friday the 22nd the rebs charged on us and they kept it up til dark. They took us by surprise and they drove some of the regiments back a little but they rallied and got in line and got reinforcements and then they drove the rebs like fury. Well, I can't tell you the whole affair, so I will tell you I have lived through up to this date, which is my forty-eights birthday.

We are fortified now pretty close to Atlanta. Our men took a lot of pressure and we lost some. Expect there is two missing from the 25th, Shales and Commell. I can't tell where they are; probably killed or captured. I am in hopes Uncle Bur is all right, yet I see in the wood stock central the names of the prisoners and I saw one name called Lewis Bur Co. H, and the Company H boys say they had no such name in their company as they knew of so I think it must be a mistake in printing and the person must be Uncle Bur.

I saw David Hamon and I saw Marion yesterday. They said Riley was all right. He is at the teams. I think David Hamon was left to Kingston with William and went to Chattanooga. Well, Mary Jane, you letters come all right now directed that way. Maj. Worden's battalion, 3rd Brigade, 3rd Division 17th Army Corps via Nashville 10. I have borrowed a couple of stamps till Uncle Thomas sends me some.

I think you are improving in writing fast. I hope you won't think of getting married yet and stick to school as long as you can. I wish you would go til you get through the arithmetic. There is not so much fun in getting married as some thinks for. Tell Ma I will send her some money just as soon as I can. Our major Avery was here a few days ago trying to get us back to the regiment but we can not get back there til Atlanta is taken. I do not think that will be long, whoever lives to see it. The rebels seem to have nearly as much ??? as we but there is no use of my trying to tell you all about the battles. Now I thought you would be glad to hear I was not killed, so I thought I would write some. My paper and ??? is getting most gone. I must save one til I get in Atlanta. You must try to kill the rats so they won't eat you up and all your corn next winter.

Well, I must close this. You can tell all my folks how to write or direct their letters. The mail does not go only once a week now from here. Write often. Good day. Tell Ma to get up a big pile of wood for winter. I do not expect to come home til my time is out. That won't be long now.

From your old dad to Jane and Mrs. Huldah Burdick. Tell Thomas when he is home he must hoe the taters and the cabbage good. I will fetch him a present of something.

Well Ma, William has come since I closed this letter. They have sent him to the front. He says he feels a good deal better, but I am sorry he as come. He will be so badly exposed in the battle, but if he is killed I can't help it. He says he could have stayed to home and done duty in the hospital be he rather comer where I was. But where I am is a hard place. I do not expect him to live through the battles when I go it. Well, don't worry about us. I will do my best. I opened this to put in a few lines about Bill. Now I will close again.

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From Eli Burdick, To Huldah, his wife  
Mentions his children Mary Jane, Thomas, Henrietta, and Julia Ann  
Eastport, Mississippi, February the 4th, 1865

Well, Huldah, I have not received any letter since I wrote my last, so I thought I would send off a few lines today. It will let you know that I am restored to as good health nearly as ever. I think my diarrhea is over. I went to the doctor for medicine but it did not seem to do any good, so a man told me to pulverize a spoonful of charcoal and take that. So I did and when the charcoal passed my bowels a great big worm was with the rest and ever since I have been gaining. I had lost my appetite for eating but now I can eat anything.

The sutler happened along while I was a gruting. I had no money so I ran my face for five dollars worth of traps. I costs very high here. Butter 80 cents per pound, cheese 50 cents per pound, peaches put up in pound cans one dollar, blackberry pound cans one dollar, strawberry the same, raisins 75 cents per pound, and other things according, so if I am well I shall try to eat government rations.

There is a rumor in camp that we will move down on the Mississippi River within a few days. I hope we shall, but they say we are to stop a spell to Memphis then in the spring commence a campaign against Mobile. But I do not know where we will go next summer. I expect to have a hard summers campaign, but I feel confident I shall live to see my time out, so you must raise a big potato pile and a big pile of onions and cabbage and tomatoes and take pains to raise a big bed of parsnips, beet, carrots. Have the ground plowed deep, especially the parsnip bed. Mary Jane can keep the garden weeded nice and she knows how to sow seeds.

Plant you beds far enough apart one way so the hoe will go between the rows and not take the plants. Then the other way the plants can be a little closer. Thomas, as soon as the frost is out of the dung pile you must take some of the oldest dung and put on the ground where you want your beds. Well, Mary Jane, you know how I had the garden made when I came in the service. Now try your best, you and Thomas, and see how nice you can have it look when I get home next fall.

Plant your posies next the house, your morning glories first and stick brush or little stakes for them to run up on. Well, I am tired again and I will have to leave you to do all you can work for seven or eight months longer. That will soon slip by, so good-bye to you all, hoping these lines will find you all well. Jane, write often. If you get some stamps to spare, send me some.

Give my respect to all.

Eli Burdick to, Huldah Burdick, Mary Jane Burdick, Thomas R. Burdick, Henret Burdick, Julia Ann Burdick

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From Eli Burdick, To Huldah, his wife, Mentions William, his son, and other children  
Camp Near New Orleans, March 3rd, 1865

Well, Huldah, I felt so lonesome today and had not much else to do so I thought I would sent out a few lines to let you know that I am as well as usual and that is nothing to brag of and I hope that these lines will find you all in good health and spirits. I got a letter from William a few days ago. He said he had got his descriptive list and that he was as well as he had been any time since he left me. I expect he will send you some pay before long. I hope he will for the Mercy knows when I shall get any pay. If he sends you money you must use it to the best use you can, for I

expect I shall have to make it up to him some day. I expect his woman has soured on him so she won't live with him. I would like to know what he done so bad to her.

Well, the weather is so warm here I think I shall have to duff my coat or I shall swelter. The woods are all leaves, new and green and the dewberries is in the blow and a great many posy bushes and the ripe oranges on the trees and the clover is up, so the cows can get a good bite and can fill their bellies so they stick out big all the while. I hear Uncle Bur was alive a few days ago. I am in hopes he will soon get away from the rebs. Well, I hear that the rebs have evacuated Charleston. Whether that will help us any or not I can't say, but I expect when we leave here we shall have a wild goose chase somewhere, but this six months is my last goose chase in this army. Well, old pullet, stave ahead and get two or three fleeces of wool and spin it up so I can have some socks knit next winter and the gals can knit it.

I have not had a letter from Mary Jane. Well, write often and let me know all the plans and all the news, and every time you write, tell me how your crops is a-doing and your garden too. Well, Mary Jane, you won't have to farm it alone next summer. I hope I will do that. Well, as I have wrote all I can think of, I will close. Tell Et and Dude to look for Daddy about the first of October. Tell them to go to school this summer like ladies if they want some new dresses when I come. Thomas, if you work out in harvest you must try to earn enough to get you some new clothes for next winter.

Good-bye for this time.

Eli Burdick to Huldah Burdick and all the rest.

["Dood" appears to be Julia Ann]

["Et" is Henrietta]

[Mary Jane is therefore "Mate"]



Vicksburg Nov the 4<sup>th</sup> 1863

Dear pullet and chicken, your old  
Creeper rooster has put up fifty  
five dollars in the old pocket  
book to send to you I have sent  
A letter in the same side  
with the money bur has put in  
fifty five dollars down up in a  
letter stating what to do with  
his money he wants you to let  
mr drake have fifty and take  
A receipt then let granpa have  
five and bur wants you to get  
A receipt of mr drake for the  
coat of John orth's for the harness  
I rite this because I doant know  
when cordean will start he has  
got A furlo and is Awaiting  
to get it sind so maby this will  
reach you before he dose I have  
rote to uncle Tomis burdick to.

you would want to keep some  
money to help suport them chickens  
as the season for scratching for  
worms is about over so I shal have  
to furnish a little help if I was  
there I could furnish some wormes  
or help scratch for some if you  
think you can by more fencing  
you may do so but dont rob your  
selvs of all your money keep some  
to help you I shall send some more  
proably before christmas william  
stick to the fence ee mr smith  
and ee if he will change workz with  
you next spring and help you  
bild fence mr lawly will help you  
drive your poasts I think he is  
A vary comadainy naber the wether  
is vary warm here for november  
it is raineing to day there is not much  
war nuse here to rite we are  
lainy in camp now maby lay here  
till spring it will sute me if we do

Old pullet the youngest chickens  
preasant is in the middle of the  
pocket book I will send some for  
the rest some other time or send  
A bill then you can get the silver  
each chicken A half dolar and  
ma will have A preasant when  
the war is over and gets hir old  
man back or A pester when he comes  
I have rote foldaleral enough

so I will close by saying  
if cordean bruce doant come  
I will send the money by some  
one elce god by give my  
spectz to all

from Mr Eliburdick  
to Mrs huldah burdick  
his worthy old companion  
and all the children  
And granpa and gran ma  
good by